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FOR THE SECRETARY

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SUBJECT: POLISH FOREIGN MINISTER MELLER'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe, reasons 1.4b,d

11. (C) Summary: Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Meller travels to Washington next week as the representative of a new center-right government that pledges continuity in foreign policy and sustained engagement in support of democracy throughout the world. Meller is expected to bring a positive message on Poland's Iraq deployment, with or without a formal Polish government decision. He will highlight Poland's interest in advancing reforms in Eastern Europe and will seek assurances that his government will remain an integral part of common efforts there. Meller will be looking for signs of movement on U.S. visa policy, including a more forward-leaning statement from us on Poland's visa waiver aspirations and a response to Polish President Kwasniewski's suggestion of no-cost visas for students. Energy security, strengthened defense and security cooperation, and Polish representation in international organizations are among his other expected themes. Your discussions with him should include reference to upcoming Strategic Dialogue talks and the first post-inaugural visit of President Lech Kaczynski to Washington. End summary.

New Polish government

12. (C) Meller represents a country whose political landscape has been dramatically altered since your visit here in February. Poland has once again performed its post-1989 ritual of alternating post-communist and post-Solidarity governments. Control of the government, very soon the presidency and, to a lesser degree, the parliament is now in the hands of the center-right Law and Justice (PiS) party. The new PiS-led minority government of PM Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and President-elect Kaczynski were elected this fall on promises of sweeping domestic reforms aimed at rooting out corruption, "de-communizing" public life, and expanding government social programs. The new government will seek to show that it is defending Poland's interests more vigorously than its predecessors, with consequences for relations with us and Poland's EU partners (as we have seen on the EU budget), but Marcinkiewicz and others have stated clearly that they will preserve the country's Atlanticist orientation. The government will be forced to depend in parliament, however, on the votes of fiercely nationalist opposition parties such as the populist Self-Defense and the right-wing League of Polish Families (whose electorates PiS also hopes to capture), and this is bound to complicate policy making. Although its position is secure, the government could well seek new elections in 2006 if its legislative agenda stalls. PiS would stand to improve its strength in parliament, judging by recent opinion polls.

13. (C) The new Polish government hopes to highlight its close relations with the United States, particularly on strategic issues, as it approaches its stated objective of strengthening Poland's position in Europe and the wider world. For all the Euroskepticism of many of PiS's leaders and despite pressure from outright opponents of the EU in parliament, this government recognizes that Poland's prosperity and its future development depend on EU membership; moreover, public support for EU membership remains very high, as the material benefits became apparent even in the first months following accession. The Kaczynski brothers' barely-concealed antipathy towards Russia and Germany is likely to be held in check, in recognition of the importance of improved relations with those neighboring states, but long-standing strategic concerns and historical memories underscore, for many, the need for a strong alliance with the U.S. -- not only as a potential counterweight to Brussels.

FM Meller a career diplomat, Russia expert

14. (C) By its selection of professionals for the foreign and defense portfolios, PiS has sought to reassure international partners who might be concerned that its populist reform agenda will extend to foreign affairs. However, the conservative and relatively inexperienced President-elect Lech Kaczynski and, behind the scenes, his twin brother Jaroslaw are widely expected to want to exert direct control

over foreign policy. Foreign Ministry officials have privately reacted with concern to plans to strengthen the foreign affairs departments of the prime minister's office and the presidential chancellery, although their real impact will not be clear until after the new president takes office December 23. A well-regarded career diplomat (most recently Poland's ambassador to Moscow), FM Meller lacks both political standing and a personal relationship with the Kaczynskis. We do not yet have a sense of how he views his role within the government, but one of his key advisors confided that the MFA intends to try to stay "fifteen minutes ahead" of party officials and guide policy through better preparation. You will find Meller a cordial and professional interlocutor.

Meller's Agenda: Iraq, Eastern Policy, Visas, Respect

15. (C) Foreign Minister Meller intends to deliver a clear message that our strategic relationship will continue uninterrupted by the change in government. Your remarks should welcome the new government's declared interest in deepening this relationship and underscore our determination to sustain a true partnership with the Poles. Sensitivities and perceptions that we have not responded adequately to Polish support in Iraq (whether in terms of military assistance or of less directly related things, such as visa policy) remain widely felt here, but the new government is keen to work with us to come up with demonstrable evidence of the U.S.-Polish partnership.

16. (C) Although it is not yet clear whether the Polish government will make a formal decision on its Iraq mission in advance of Meller's visit, Polish MFA officials maintain that Meller will provide you, at a minimum, with the general outlines of the Polish approach. Meller's staff suggests that we will get to a good outcome concerning extension of the Polish deployment into 2006 and that the foreign minister recognizes -- without undermining Polish Defense Minister Sikorski's recent requests in support of Polish deployments and defense transformation -- that conditioning such a decision on increased U.S. assistance will not be viewed positively by us. Meller will be interested in hearing your assessment of December 15 parliamentary elections in Iraq and their impact on next year's mission.

17. (C) Long an active partner in the promotion of democratic and economic reform in Eastern Europe, Poland under the new center-right government can be expected to step up its engagement, particularly in neighboring Belarus and Ukraine. FM Meller will want to exchange views on further coordination, and may seek to ensure that Poland not be left out of joint U.S. and European efforts. MFA officials told us that they had heard that Washington intends to encourage Germany to take a leading role in the east, and they apparently fear being sidelined. Given your respective backgrounds, Meller may wish to discuss developments in Russia as well, although it is worth noting that his focus at this point appears to be repairing bilateral ties, which had deteriorated badly over the past year. The MFA was unwilling to approach the Russians on the draft NGO law, for example, suggesting that they already had enough on their plate as it was.

18. (C) On visa policy, FM Meller can be expected to take account of our road map process, but also press further for some new signs of progress. Specifically, the Polish government is looking for an unqualified statement articulating a clear, shared vision of visa-free travel for Poles, and for some gesture from us in response to President Kwasniewski's proposal that we waive application fees for students and other young travelers.

19. (C) As noted above, one recurring element in the Polish approach to these issues is the assumption (widely shared, especially among PiS officials) that Poland's contributions are undervalued and that the country has somehow not been given its due. Former PM Belka's unsuccessful OECD candidacy has contributed to that view, and we understand from MFA officials that Meller would like to highlight Polish concerns about the lack of high-ranking Poles in international organizations.

Other strategic issues

10. (C) While in Washington, Foreign Minister Meller intends to review Polish interest in energy security policy in both the EU and NATO context (the Russian-German gas pipeline project remains a source of great consternation here), non-proliferation, defense transformation and other strategic issues that are certain to be addressed in more detail in upcoming Strategic Dialogue talks. The Poles view PSI as a great success, for example, and would like to exchange views on the possibility of expanding it. Meller's approach to defense cooperation will contrast with Defense Minister

Sikorski's in style if not in substance. He will not seek immediate commitments or major initiatives requiring FMF but will underscore Poland's need for support in defense modernization. Meller will look for ways to achieve this, perhaps including more PSI exercises.

11. (C) FM Meller might also raise missile defense, as Polish officials are keen to obtain a definitive review of our MD planning, and remain very interested in further discussions concerning a Polish site. PM Marcinkiewicz was forced to backpedal publicly from his government program's explicit -- and premature -- position seeking an MD site, but there is no question that the Poles want to pursue this; they are especially keen that Poland not be overlooked in favor of another state in the region. An MD site, in the GOP's view, would be a symbol of U.S.-Polish defense cooperation.

12. (C) Meller's staff expects that the renditions and "CIA prisons" issue will continue to dog the Polish government, despite our and the Poles' best efforts to put this story to rest. In response to sustained media pressure, PM Marcinkiewicz announced December 10 that his government will order an internal probe "to close the issue." Meller anticipates being asked about renditions by the Polish press while in Washington, and the MFA has asked that we remain in close contact to coordinate our public stance.

13. (C) Finally, President-elect Kaczynski's plans to visit the U.S. early in the new year should be more clear by the time of Meller's meetings, and we have recommended that the foreign minister use his discussions to preview the new president's agenda and to discuss Polish objectives for that visit.
ASHE